CITYSCAPES: ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course proposes a theoretical and thematic review of the city-form in the Middle East, Europe and the US. Investigating the dialectic between social processes in cities and cities as social processes, we will discuss the prominence of cities as social and sociological problems. The course falls into two parts. The first examines the analytic vocabulary and theoretical assumptions that have constructed cities as objects of study. This part follows the classics of urban studies (Weber, Simmel) and the Chicago School, through socio-spatial approaches to new modes of theorization (the Los Angeles School). Special attention will be paid to the construction of urban communities and cultures and to the emergence of new phenomena such as gentrification, hyper-ghettos and gated communities. The second part of the course will focus on specific city types from a critical historical and ethnographic perspective. Such cases include the European medieval city, the Islamic city, the ethnically mixed city, the (post)colonial city and the Mediterranean city.

At the crossroads of conflicting global interests and cultural images, the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the global south continue to challenge the political and anthropological imagination. Dominant understandings, however, are shaped by powerful essentialist tendencies: Orientalist stereotypes, religious reductionisms and nationalist ideologies. All of these interpretive paradigms, in popular as well as in much of the scholarly discourse, project and reify a view of the Middle East and the “South” principally as sites of either religious authenticity, nationalist extremism, cultural autochthony or poverty. Symbolically mapped through spatial key-metaphors of the “holy cities,” such as Jerusalem, Mecca and Najaf, the Middle Eastern space is heavily associated with the “sacred” (with its discourses of eschatology and redemption), while simultaneously being fixated as “stagnant,” “traditional,” and “despotic.” This course construes the Middle East and the European South as an anthropological and historical laboratory, inviting students to explore through cities central debates in the social sciences about such themes as modernization, nomadism, colonialism, nationalism, “fundamentalism,” cosmopolitanism, gender and patriarchy. Structured along these themes, the course problematizes the relations between the “urban” and the “regional” (as institutionalized in Middle Eastern “area studies”), while utilizing them as a lens into broader theoretical inquiry.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This is an introductory graduate course in urban studies, urban sociology and urban anthropology. Sociology/Anthropology students should be registered to Key Issues in Social and Cultural Anthropology and Key Issues in Social Theory. Visiting students or students from other departments are not required to follow these requirements. Students are expected to critically engage the main theories in urban anthropology and social theory through discussion in class and weekly feedback. While developing their own projects students will reflect on the dynamics of scale between region, state and city. At the end of the term students will be able to deconstruct geopolitical categories such as the Middle East, the EU and the Mediterranean from a historical and spatial approach and point to mechanisms of mediation and exclusion on different scales of action. Special heed will be given to ethnographic methods in urban settings.

[1] Careful preparation of assigned readings by the date on which they are to be discussed in class. Class discussion will require informed participation on the part of all.

[2] Submission via email to all participating students by 5PM each Thursday of a substantive discussion question on the then-current reading material for potential use in class discussion on Friday.

NOTE: A discussion question, to stimulate discussion, not to close it off, is concise; it is not just a declaration of a [= your] position, though in its formulation you probably reveal a positioned perspective on issues. A discussion question properly emerges, in reading, from your perceiving that there is an issue needing exploration or clarification, perhaps to resolve or at least confront problematic concepts or analyses in one or another of the current week’s readings. It can involve as well the concurrent or contrastive positions on an issue you may see in two of the readings, the nature of that concurrence or contrast being perhaps in question in some way. A (very!) short quotation or citation (with page reference) is generally useful to orient discussion of the point, since it gives a textual location to the issue. The text of the question as formulated should make clear what is being sought in the way of responses; avoid such formats as: “‘[Quote].’ Discussion” – and the like.

GRADE:
Reading, Participation and Project Presentation (last two weeks): 35%
Mid-term paper: 20%
Final Research Paper: 45%
CLASS FORMAT:
We will begin each class with an introductory lecture that treats the themes and readings for that week. The second part should function to promote class discussion and student-led conversation about the various reading assignments and other materials. In addition, select films will be screened and debated in class.

PART ONE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF URBAN STUDIES

1. Introduction: Framing the City

   Film: Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance

2. Defining the Urban: The City as a State of Mind and as a Theater
   - Simmel, Georg, [1903] “The Stranger”
   - Lynch, Kevin. “The Image of the City”

3. The Chicago School: Early Conceptual Approaches to Urban Structure
   - Park et al. (Chapter 8: “Can Neighborhood Work have a Scientific Basis?”) In The City.
   - Wirth “Urbanism as a Way of Life” In Metropolis.

4. Socio-spatial Approaches and Urban Spatialization


Film: Metropolis

5. Cities, Citizenship and Violence

- Sasssen, S. “The Global Street” Globalizations 8:5.
- Monterescu, D. and Shaindlinger, N. Situational Radicalism: The Israeli Arab Spring the (Un)Making of the Rebel City Constellations.

Film: La Haine (Hate)

6. Urban Community, Culture, Networks

- Young, Iris Marion. “City Life and Difference”
- Park et al The City (Chapter 9: “Mind of a Hobo” and Chapter 6: “Community Organization and the Romantic Temper”). [recommended]

Film: Dogville or Manderlay

7. Gentrification and Gated Communities

- Davis, Mike “Fortress Los Angeles: the Militarization of Urban Space” In Metropolis.
- Monterescu, Daniel. 2009. “To Buy Or Not To Be: Trespassing the Andromeda Hill Gate Community” Public Culture
8. Reading Urban Ethnography

- Excerpts from *Slim’s Table*

Mid-term Paper: Observing the City

PART TWO: CASE STUDIES

9. Medieval Cities in Europe


11. Ethnically Mixed Towns in Palestine/Israel

- Rabinowitz, D. and Monterescu, D, 2008. IJMES. “Reconfiguring the Mixed Town”

12. Urban Rhythms

12. Colonial and Postcolonial Cities: Governance, Planning and Diasporas


Recommended Films (mostly available at the library)
- Metropolis
- La Haine
- Dogville or Manderlay
- Prince of the Streets (Ali Zaoua, Casablanca).
- Virtual Cairo (Nezar AlSayyad).
- Tales from Arab Detroit
- "Chahin's cairo", or "Alexandria Why?" (Yusuf Chahin)
- Cairo, the City Victorious
- Gegen die Wand (Fatih Akin, translated into English as "Head On", Istanbul)
- The Battle of Algiers
- Pepe le Moko (Casablanca)
- Les Silences du Palais (Moufida Tlali, Tunis)
- Doors to the Sky (Faridah bin al-Yazid, Morocco)

Presentations of individual research projects (last week)

**Final paper due January 1, 2013**